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FROM: American Embassy, Benghazi

DESP. NO. 63

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

DATE: August 19, 1959

REF: Benghazi Despatch No. 61, dated August 18, 1959

E-1

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	AF-5	
	REC'D	INFO RM/R-2 IRC-8 W/MSC-3 ICA-11 S/R-1
	8-22-59	CIA-10 OSD-4 ARMY-4 NAVY-3 AIR-3

USIA-10

SUBJECT: Time Magazine Article and Libyan Gratitude for American Assistance.

When I called on the Minister of Communications at his request on August 18, he opened the conversation by referring to the recent article in an American publication which had described the attitude of Libyans generally as unappreciative and ungrateful for American assistance. While the Minister did not refer to the publication specifically, I assume that he was referring to the article published in Time Magazine in its July 27 issue. Nasir Kizza said that he would like to assure me that this portrayal of the Libyan attitude toward the United States was untrue and unfounded. He said that he had made it a point to speak to many officials in the Libyan Government and had satisfied himself that the majority of the Libyan people are sincerely grateful to the United States for the recent gift of grain which had actually arrived at the time of grievous need.

The Minister referred to our most recent conversation at his office in Beida and my query regarding the timely distribution of the grain locally, particularly in his native area. He said that while it was true that the distribution might not have been carried out equally well in all sections; that perhaps certain district commanders (Mutassaref) had neglected deliberately or inadvertently to distribute grain to particular farmers, this did not alter the fact that the gift from America reached Libya in time and had been distributed to the majority of the needy populance. In addition to the benefit to the recipients, the arrival of American grain had caused a sharp drop in local price, so that even those who were not classed as needy families were now able to purchase grain in the local market at a reasonable figure.

I thanked the Minister for his expressions of appreciation and for his gratifying report on the reaction of his fellow countrymen to American assistance. I told the Minister that I was sure he was aware of the freedom of the press in the United States which indeed was guaranteed by constitutional provisions. With the exception of the "wireless file" which was received in Benghazi and made available to the Director of the Press and Publications, all other American publications which might be available to him were published by private individuals or publishing houses and thus completely outside the control of the U.S. Government. I went on to say that in present circumstances, with the discovery of large quantities of petroleum in Libya's sub-soil, this country had become and would continue to be of new and intense interest to commercial and economic circles around the world. Consequently, Libyans would find more and more articles

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E.M.W.

G.M.Rafi 5/6/82

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REPORTER

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being written about their country by various persons, reflecting various points of view. Therefore, they must become accustomed to this new-found notoriety and, as we in the United States have been forced to do, develop a thicker skin to public expression than had been necessary in the past.

The Minister replied that he was not making a protest against this article or expressing any criticism of the American publication involved, pointing out that this was not his province but that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He concluded that he only wished to make the point that the article was not correct in describing the reaction of Libyans to the United States and its past assistance to his country.

Subsequently in the conversation we discussed maintenance and repair of the Coastal Road in which ICA funds are involved. I referred to a recent newspaper report of the awarding of a contract for 12,000 Libyan Pounds to reconstruct the war-damaged bridge at Kilometer 70, east of Tripoli. The Minister confirmed that the tender had been granted an Italian firm. I noted that this improvement would make travel easier and more comfortable between Tripoli and Homs, where the classic ruins of Leptis Magna are found. I took this occasion to refer to a more recent issue of Time Magazine (August 10, 1959) and its four-page color spread of Leptis which I felt sure would make an important contribution to the attraction of American tourists to Libya.

J. Wesley Jones

cc American Embassy, Tripoli